

"A Ritual of Connection: All of Us-Again"
Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Rev. Mary Gear
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I've felt at a loss for words lately. What does one say when the world is on fire with such pain and rage? The anger and rage in response to centuries of violence and oppression, centuries of grief at police brutality and racism. Centuries; generations.

Like many, I am inspired by the voices of our young people, those in the streets and those here. Thanks to each of you who shared your words and experiences this morning. Brisa, your thoughts were deep and wise. Thank you.

And, we can't count on our young people to fix everything. There is action to be taking now so that we adults leave a legacy that is as good as we can make it. Where do we begin?

The spiritual theme for this month is compassion. [CompassionLab](#) defines compassion as:

"...the heart's response to suffering. Compassion — from the roots passio (suffering) and com (with) — means to suffer with another. Compassion is an innate part of human response to suffering, which is comprised of a three-part experience of noticing another's pain, feeling with another, and responding in some way.

Compassion seems like a good place to build a foundation for being an ally and for a future of justice.

Compassion is different from empathy. Yes, empathy is important—noticing and feeling the suffering of another person is important. Compassion takes it one step further—we not only notice and feel, we act to remove the source of suffering.

The steps are important, too. The first step is to notice. The action is to become aware, to turn our attention to the suffering of others. We can't turn away; we are called to turn toward.

The next step is feeling with another. This isn't feeling our pain, although there is that. In order to feel the pain of another, we have to be in relationship with the other and listen deeply to their experience of suffering. It may be very different from ours. The action is to build relationships and actively listen to the experiences and feelings of others.

Then, with our focused attention on relationship with deep listening, we take action to alleviate the cause of suffering. Compassion is a process of ever-deepening engagement and connection powered by love.

The thing is compassion hurts. It requires that we be able to face the suffering of others. It also requires that we be able to feel and face our own suffering, including the pain of seeing others suffer. And, that requires that we be spiritually grounded and connected. As Ashley Horan said in our opening reading: "...pause. Take a deep breath, say a prayer, sing a song, light your chalice, feel the force of gravity pulling us all toward the same center—whatever helps you feel more rooted and less alone."

It is spiritual practice and spiritual community that helps us prepare for the work of compassion, which is work for justice.

And so, today I invite us, who are gathered in spiritual community, to practice together so that we may be rooted and ready to do what the world calls us to do.

Will you join me as we say some words together, pray together, hold silence together and sing together.

We begin with a litany, which means that you have a part. Your part is in the chat and is this:

I am with you in this. Let's say this together: I am with you in this.

This litany is offer by Peter Lund:

To the refugee family seeking a safe place

For their children's dreams, say:

I am with you in this.

To the trans teenager longing for a world

That accepts them for who they are, say:

I am with you in this.

To the black parents wondering when

Will the lives of their children truly matter, say:

I am with you in this.

To the lonely, the frightened, the dispossessed, say:

I am with you in this.

To the bullied, the battered, the broken down, say:

I am with you in this.

To the hungry and the homeless,

To the silenced and the shamed,

To the weary and the worried, say:

I am with you in this.

To all those for whom your

Disheveled heart is aching, say:

I am with you in this.

We lit our chalices with words and gestures. I invite you to say those words and do those gestures together again. This time, I invite you to imagine the “you” and the “we” as big as you can, as wide and as deep as you can imagine so that it may encompass the infinite web of life and love, of which we are a part.

Let’s take a deep breath together--in and out.

Please repeat after me:

I am here. (hands on heart)

You are here. (hands out front)

We are here together. (hands encircled)

May that be so.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer. (Inspired by Lindsay Bates)

Receive, O Mystery, the words of our hearts.

If prayer worked like magic—if I knew the words that would guarantee prayer's power—I know what I would pray:

Let life be always kind to all children.

Let sorrow not touch them.

Let them be free from fear.

Let them never suffer injustice,

nor the persecutions of the righteous.

Let them not know the pain of failure –

of a project, a love, a hope, or a dream.

Let life be to them gentle and joyful and kind.

If I knew the formula, that's what I'd pray.

This would be my prayer for all children and for all people.

But prayer isn't magic, and life is hard. So, I pray for our children and for all people—with some hope for this prayer:

May their knowledge of sorrow be tempered with joy.

May their fear be well-balanced by courage and strength.

May the sight of injustice spur them to just actions.

May their failures be teachers, that their spirits may grow.

May they be gentle and joyful and kind.

Then their lives will be magic, and life will be good.

So may it be. Blessed be and Amen.

Let's hold a moment of silence together.